

Everything You Wanted To Know About ListServes But Were Afraid To Ask....

Written by Tim Blum

Published in the CSAE Executive Memo (April 2003)

What is a listserve?

A listserve is a super charged, interactive email list. When you send a message to the list, that message is then served, commonly referred to as sent, to everyone on the list. Each listserve provides subscribers an address where messages can be sent.

What is the purpose of the listserve?

The listserve can be a very useful tool in a number of ways. A listserve in the simplest terms is an e-mail discussion group. Subscribers come together using this tool to share information. The listserve is a forum, much like that of a face-to-face meeting, except all the discussion happens over e-mail.

What is a subscriber?

A listserve is nothing more than a list of e-mail addresses. If your email address is on this list, you are known as a subscriber to the listserve.

Why should I be a subscriber?

In some ways it's better than a face-to-face meeting because you are able to ask a question or share an answer with an entire list of people all at once. The potential variety of discussions and assortment of answers is endless.

How do I unsubscribe from the list?

The listserve is interactive in that a person can unsubscribe from the e-mail list at anytime. This process is automated and usually varies from listserve to listserve. To unsubscribe from the listserve you send a message to the list with the word unsubscribe in the subject line of your message. Nothing should be written in the body of the message.

How do I send a message to the listserve?

Only subscribers may post messages to the list. If you are a subscriber, this can be done very easily.

1. Create a new e-mail message.
2. Enter the email address of the listserve into the "To" field of your email message.
3. Enter a descriptive subject of your message into the "Subject" line of your e-mail message.
4. Type your message into the "Body" portion of the e-mail message.
5. Following your message add your name, title, company, and phone number.
6. Click send.

Once you click send your message will be sent to all subscribers of the listserve. You will receive a copy of your own message since you are a subscriber of the listserve.

How do I respond to a question on the listserve?

Follow the instructions under "How do I send a message to the listserve." The only change is that instead of creating a new message (step one), just hit the reply button on the email message you received that contained the question your responding to. Your reply will be sent to the entire list. To reply to only the individual who had the question, make sure the e-mail address of that person is in the "To" field of the e-mail, and the listserve address is not.

What is a bulletin board and how does it relate to a listserve?

Something very similar to a listserve is a bulletin board. These are two different technologies. With a listserve, subscribers receive messages posted to the list directly into their e-mail program inbox. A bulletin board requires a subscriber to go to a web site, and post a message on that web site. The message does not go directly into the other subscribers inboxes. Instead a bulletin

board subscriber must also go to that web page to read the newly posted message. A good comparison might be that college bulletin board where everyone posted messages versus a phone tree where you received a phone call directly.

What questions can I ask on the listserve?

Almost all questions related to associations are appropriate. Questions regarding operational practices are most common. Questions not related to association business should be limited, if not posted at all. For these types of questions, begin the subject of the email message with "Off Topic", so other subscribers are aware of the message content.

Do I respond to the listserve or the individual who sent the question?

If the information would be helpful to most of the subscribers, send the response to the list (just hit reply). If you have personal, sensitive or off topic information, reply to the individual only.

Is there any unique listserve etiquette?

Listserve are informal. This means messages simply stating "Thank you", "I don't know", and "Sorry I can't help" and the like, aren't needed. Although this is normally good manners face to face, these pleasantries are assumed by the subscribers and only add unnecessary clutter to inboxes. Obscene, offensive, libelous, derogatory messages are also off limits. Do not post copyrighted materials.